Applied Knowledge Agenda around Access Models

An Applied Knowledge Agenda

This short document proposes key questions around issues related to access models that would constitute an Applied Knowledge Agenda. An Applied Knowledge Agenda is defined as a set of questions whose answers would greatly facilitate decision-making regarding future projects.

Searching for Successful Models

Is there such a thing as a "best model" that USAID could scale up at the national level and replicate across countries? Probably not.

Are there several key models that could be scaled up and deployed in multiple countries based on the country characteristics? If "yes", what are they? What have we learned from dot-ORG?

Does Location Matter?

Are there significant regional differences? What are they and how do they impact our work?

- What models are better suited for underserved urban areas vs. rural and remote areas?
- Should we look for locations suitable for our model or identify solutions/models tailored to specific locations? Is there a process for balancing the two approaches?

Community vs. Individual Access

Under what conditions is it preferable to focus on community access (i.e., telecenters in Rwanda, Mali and Romania) vs. individual access (micro-telco model in Paraguay, WiFi phones in Mongolia)?

- What are the economic growth and equity implications of selecting one approach or the other?
- Is it possible to combine models and technology solutions to extend impacts throughout the social layers (internet + radio + phone, or extending the reach of a micro-telco by connecting a telecenter)?

Technology Models

WLAN technologies create an alternative to the top down network deployment model associated with traditional telecom infrastructure. Infrastructure investments in Wi-Fi networks are within the reach of local entrepreneurs. A flexible infrastructure can therefore expand from the bottom up, without a preconceived plan and is better linked to the needs and attributes of local communities.

- Within this context of great opportunities for extending the reach of telecommunications, what are the latest and most effective technologies being deployed?
- How reliable are these technologies?
- What are the costs involved in deploying these technologies in a pilot context vs. in a scaled up context?
- From asynchronous connectivity (DakNet) to broadband connectivity (Macedonia Connects)– under what conditions do the various alternatives make most sense?

Ownership / Business Models

Beyond the selection of a specific technology to bring telecommunications services to an area, a key aspect of sustainability and scalability is the selection of an appropriate business model.

- What are the alternative business models?
  - Cooperatives
  - Franchises (Grameen village phone)
  - Local Entrepreneur (Rwanda)
  - Local Government
  - Community-management (Mali)

- What has been the experience with different ownership models? What works where?
- Is there one model that would be more appropriate for USAID to support?

Sustainability

Models need to be flexible enough to evolve over time and adjust to changing market conditions. For example, while the project may be the first to bring in connectivity to an area, competition is likely to emerge over time and will change the market environment.

Scaling up Successful Models

- What is the impact of universal service funds on the deployment of rural telecoms? What are the implications for USAID?

- Is scaling up always the ultimate goal? When and where could replicability be a more appropriate goal? (Romania)

- Is scaling up compatible with community-ownership or a community-driven enterprise model? Is there a trade-off between a scalable franchise model and a community-driven enterprise model?

- How can other donors and related initiatives, Universal Service Funds and the private sector contribute to scaling up efforts? (Mali's telecenter networks, Mongolia, Macedonia)

- Scaling up with private sector based on a solid profit-making proposition.
- How can the "content and applications" aspects of projects keep up with scaling up of connectivity? (Macedonia, Paraguay)

Moving Forward

- What is needed to answer the questions listed in this document is a more rigorous and focused assessment of ongoing and future activities. This will enable knowledge capture on key themes of interest, as is now being done in Peru through the Impact Assessment Activity, but across a larger number of projects;

- Once this knowledge is captured, it can be distilled and made accessible through decision support tools to help project planners and implementers make informed decisions about technologies and business models;

- Given the rapidly evolving technology environment, what is most needed is not a definitive and static knowledge base, but a process for constantly capturing, distilling and disseminating knowledge to decision-makers and practitioners.

CONTACT

Michael Tetelman
dot-ORG Program Director
mtetelma@aed.org

Related Activities

- Last Mile Initiative Impact Assessment